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WASHINGTON LETTER.

WASHINGTON, June 15, 1888.

A Conference of representatives of the Maritime nations is to be held at Washington, to revise the rules of the road at sea and the code of flag and night signals; to adopt a uniform system of signals indicating the direction in which vessels are moving in fog, mist, falling snow and thick weather, and at night; to discuss methods of saving life and property in shipwreck, etc. Five delegates, to represent the United States, will be appointed by the President.

Commander John Russell Bartlett, Chief of the U. S. Hydrographic Office, has been relieved from duty at his own request, and granted leave of absence for one year. It is understood that at the end of this period he will offer his resignation, in order to take charge of business interests at Providence, R. I. His retirement from what should have been a life-work is a public loss, greatly to be deplored.

Mr. B. A. Calonna, Assistant in charge of the Office and Topography of the U. S. Coast and Geodetic Survey, has added a new feature to the Catalogue of Charts and Other Publications, recently issued. This consists of diagrams, or index maps, so printed as to form part of the text of the Catalogue, and arranged to show the location of the charts referred to on the opposite page.

This will add to the usefulness of the Catalogue, which now extends to 138 pages 4°.

The Samoan question is, possibly, not quite settled. The President transmitted to Congress, under date of April 2, a document of 311 pages, covering : the Report of Mr. Geo. H. Bates, Special Agent of the Department of State, on the history of the Islands since the overthrow of the Steinberger government in 1876; the Report of the German Special Commissioner; and the Report of the British Commissioner. The last reviews the geography and history of the group. Among other papers are the Steinberger Constitution of 1875 (reprinted from a local journal), the municipal regulations of Apia, Maps of German and English land claims, etc. There is pending in the House of Representatives a Joint Resolution requesting the President to interpose the good offices of this Government to aid the Samoans in securing their independence.

By an Act approved March 20, 1888, the Director of the U. S. Geological Survey is required to study the practicability of constructing storage reservoirs for water in the arid portion of the country. The region in which agriculture must depend wholly upon irrigation is broadly defined by the Director as that lying W. of the 100th meridian, and embracing about 1,300,000 square miles. Deducting about 300,000 square miles for lands irreclaimable under present systems, there are left 1,000,000, which need only water to be made productive. These lands represent, at \$1.25 per acre (the minimum price of public land), a valuation of \$800,000,000; at \$30 per acre, a moderate estimate for irrigated land, they would be worth \$19,200,000,000. There can be no doubt as

to the practicability of the scheme, though it may be some time before even the smaller sum is paid into the U. S. Treasury. The Director of the Survey thinks that, after locating and investigating a number of drainage districts, the first and most important part of the work will be the construction of topographical maps, with the necessary detail.

If the requisite appropriation is made by Congress, the work will be begun without delay.

Special Issue, No. 9 (May 3, 1888) of the U. S. Consular Reports, notices the arrival in Moscow, in February last, of Capt. Jos. Wiggins, an Arctic explorer well known in England. In August, 1887, Capt. Wiggins left Newcastle-upon-Tyne in the steamer *Phoenix*, passed around the North Cape and through the Kara Strait to the Yenisei River, which he ascended for 1,000 miles, and there left his vessel for the winter. This is his third voyage made in the same way to the Siberian Coast.

H.